

SPILOTES MELANURUS DUMÉRIL, BIBRON & DUMÉRIL, 1854
(REPTILIA, SERPENTES): PROPOSED VALIDATION UNDER THE
PLENARY POWERS. Z.N.(S.) 1535

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In 1941 Smith (*Journ. Washington Acad. Sci.* 31 : 473-474) proposed the name *Drymarchon corais melanocercus* as a substitute for *Spilotes melanurus* Duméril, Bibron and Duméril, 1854 (*Erp. Gén.* 7 : 224-225), a secondary homonym of *Coluber melanurus* Schlegel, 1837 (= *Elaphe melanurus* [Schlegel]) by virtue of the inclusion of both names in *Spilotes* by Gray (*Cat. Snakes Brit. Mus.*, 1858 : 97). This proposal was made in conformance with the then accepted understanding that secondary homonyms, like primary homonyms, are automatically dead upon occurrence.

2. Subsequent discussions, as in the Paris meetings of the International Congress of Zoology (*Bull. zool. Nomencl.* 4, 1948 : 123-124), made it apparent that such a rigid interpretation of homonyms was not widely acceptable. Accordingly the name *melanurus* continued in popular use after 1943 as it had prior to 1941, even by the original author of the substitute name.

3. In the 1961 Code it is implicitly clear (Art. 59c) that names rejected as secondary homonyms prior to 1961 are to remain permanently rejected. By the automatic provisions of the Code, therefore, *melanocercus* Smith is the valid name for the form commonly referred to as *melanurus*.

4. There seems, however, to be nothing in favour in this case of insistence upon adherence to the automatic provisions and utilization of the name *melanocercus* in lieu of *melanurus*, except for the maintenance of inflexibility of application of the Code, and avoidance of disturbing the Commission for preservation of a name not particularly important in non-taxonomic literature. These considerations do not, I think, outweigh the desirability of the century-long continuity of name for a very widely distributed snake which is indeed a popular exhibit animal and is thus frequently referred to in the popular and semipopular literature. Some forty references in the taxonomic literature have occurred since 1854 in application to Mexico alone ; surely a greater number have occurred in application to the subspecies in other parts of its range, in Central and South America. The deliberately-chosen similarity of the substitute and original names does not materially alter the conclusion that it would be in the best interest of nomenclatural stability to preserve the long-used name *melanurus*.

5. Accordingly the Commission is hereby requested :

- (1) to declare under the plenary powers that the specific name *melanurus* Duméril, Bibron & Duméril, 1854, as published in the binomen *Spilotes melanurus*, is not invalidated by its Senior secondary homonym *Coluber melanurus* Schlegel, 1837 ;
- (2) to place the specific name *melanurus* Duméril, Bibron & Duméril, 1854,

as published in the binomen *Spilotes melanurus*, syntypes Mus. Hist. Nat. Paris 638, 3185, 3354, and U.S. Nat. Mus. 1416, lectotype by present designation U.S. Nat. Mus. 1416, on the Official List of Specific Names in Zoology ;

- (3) to place the specific name *melanocercus* Smith, 1941, as published in the combination *Drymarchon corais melanocercus* (a junior objective synonym of *melanurus*, *Spilotes*, Duméril, Bibron & Duméril, 1854) on the Official Index of Rejected and Invalid Specific Names in Zoology.